



Greece

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice; however, while the Government generally respects this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes face administrative obstacles or encounter legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Some non-Orthodox citizens have complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 81,935 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10.9 million. Approximately 97 percent of citizens identify themselves at least nominally with the Greek Orthodox faith. There are approximately 500,000 to 800,000 Old Calendarists--ultra-conservative Orthodox--who use the Julian calendar and adhere to traditional Greek Orthodox practice, throughout the country. The Government does not keep statistics on religious groups; censuses do not ask for religious affiliation. Officials estimate the size of the Turcophone Muslim community at 98,000 although other estimates range up to 140,000. Ethnic Greeks are a sizeable percentage of most Christian non-Orthodox denominations. The Jehovah's Witnesses report having approximately 30,000 active members and 50,000 people affiliated with the faith; Members of the Roman Catholic faith are estimated at 50,000; Protestants, including evangelicals, at 30,000; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) at 300. Scientologists report 500 active registered members. The longstanding Jewish community numbers approximately 5,000 adherents; an estimated 2,000 reside in Thessaloniki. Approximately 250 members of the Baha'i Faith, the majority of whom are citizens of non-Greek ethnicity, are scattered throughout the country. Followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions report 2,000 members. There also are small populations of Anglicans, Baptists, and nondenominational Christians. There is no official or unofficial estimate of atheists.

The majority of non-citizen residents are not Greek Orthodox. The largest group is the Albanians (approximately 700,000 including legal and illegal residents); most Albanians are secular in orientation. Despite such secularism, Albanians traditionally associate themselves with the Muslim, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic faiths. Aside from the indigenous Muslim minority in Thrace, the Muslim immigrant population in the rest of the country is estimated at 200,000 to 300,000.

Roman Catholics reside primarily in Athens and on the islands of Syros, Tinos, Naxos, and Corfu, as well as in the cities of Thessaloniki and Patras. Immigrants from the Philippines, Poland, and Iraq also practice Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic immigrant population is estimated to be 200,000. The Bishop of Athens heads the Roman Catholic Holy Synod.

Some religious groups, such as the Greek evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses, consist almost entirely of ethnic Greeks and some Russian and Albanian immigrants. Other groups, such as Mormons and Anglicans, consist of an approximately equal number of ethnic Greeks and non-Greeks.

The indigenous Muslim community, concentrated in Thrace with small communities in Rhodes, Kos, and Athens, is composed mainly of Turcophones but also includes Roma and Pomaks, a Slav-origin linguistic minority. A growing number of Muslim immigrants live in Athens and in rural areas.

Scientologists and followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions, most of whom are located in the Athens area, practice

their faith through registered nonprofit civil law organizations.

Foreign missionary groups in the country, including Protestants and Mormons, are active; the Mormons state that they sponsor approximately 80 missionaries in the country each year.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the prevailing religion, and provides for freedom of religion. However, while the Government generally respects this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes face administrative obstacles or encounter legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles. The Orthodox Church exercises significant political and economic influence. The Government, under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Religion, provides some financial support. For example, the Government pays for the salaries and religious training of clergy, and finances the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings. The Government also passed taxation legislation in 2004 that gradually abolishes by 2007 tax on revenues for Greek Orthodox Churches and institutions. While this appears to preferentially benefit the Greek Orthodox Church, leaders of other faiths reported that such laws typically refer only to the Greek Orthodox Church. Upon judicial examination, the laws are usually applied to all churches; however this practice presents unnecessary administrative obstacles for non-Orthodox churches.

In 2005, a series of scandals alleging the theft of antiquities, trial-fixing, and other illegal and immoral behavior by high-ranking Greek Orthodox clerics shook the powerful Orthodox Church. The scandals renewed discussion in the media of a separation of church and state.

In 2001, the Government added a conscientious objector provision to the Constitution. A government ombudsman office provided an effective means for citizens to resolve human rights and religious freedom problems. The office was granted adequate resources to perform its functions and was widely recognized. These two developments helped foster government tolerance of minority religions.

The Orthodox Church, Judaism, and Islam are the only groups considered to be "legal persons of public law." Other religions are considered "legal persons of private law." In practice, the primary distinction is that the Civil Code's provisions pertaining to corporations regulate the establishment of "houses of prayer" for religions besides the Orthodox Church, Judaism, or Islam. For example, other religions cannot own property as religious entities; the property must belong to a specifically created legal entity rather than to the religious body itself. In practice, this places an additional legal and administrative burden on other religious community organizations, although in most cases this process has been handled routinely. Members of religious groups that are classified as private entities cannot be represented in court as religious entities and cannot bequeath or inherit property as a religious entity. The law extended legal recognition as a private entity to Roman Catholic churches and related entities established prior to 1946. By virtue of the Orthodox Church's status as the prevailing religion, the Government recognizes the Orthodox Church's canon law, both within the church and in such areas of civil law as marriage. The Catholic Church unsuccessfully has sought government recognition of its canon law since 1999.

Two laws from the 1930s require recognized or "known" religious groups to obtain "house of prayer" permits from the Ministry of Education and Religion to open houses of worship. No formal mechanism exists to gain recognition as a known religion. By law, the Ministry may base its decision to issue permits on the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop. Documentation provided by Scientology representatives, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Greek Orthodox Church indicates the Government does consult with local bishops in some cases. The involvement of bishops in the house of prayer permit process has given rise to some problems; there are three pending cases in which local Orthodox bishops have reportedly appealed to the Council of State, the highest administrative court, to annul house of prayer permits for Jehovah's Witness houses of worship in Halkidiki and Serres.

According to the Ministry's officials, applications for additional houses of prayer are numerous and are approved routinely; however, Scientologists have not been able to register or build a house of prayer. A group which follows the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition applied twice in the last three years for a house of prayer permit but has not received an official response to its applications, despite advice from the ombudsman to the Ministry of Education and Religion to respond to its requests. The Jehovah's Witnesses have had five house of prayer permit requests pending since May 2004. Additionally, non-Orthodox religious groups must provide separate and lengthy applications to authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move an official house of prayer to a larger facility.

Leaders of some non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that all taxes on religious organizations are discriminatory, even those that the Orthodox Church has to pay, because the Government subsidizes the Orthodox Church, while other groups are self-supporting.

Muslim religious leaders say there are approximately 375 mosques in Thrace. The Government pays the salaries of the two official Muslim religious leaders, or "muftis," and the salaries of approximately 20 out of 130 imams. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne gives Muslims in Thrace the right to maintain social and charitable organizations called "wakfs" and allows muftis to render religious judicial services in the area of family law.

The Lausanne Treaty provides the Turcophone Muslim minority with the right to Turkish-language education, and provides a reciprocal entitlement for the Greek minority in Istanbul (less than 3,000 persons). Western Thrace has secular Turkish-language bilingual schools and two Qur'anic schools funded by the state. As of 2004, approximately 7,000 Muslim students are enrolled in Turkish bilingual grammar schools and 953 attend minority high schools. Another 280 students, many of whom become schoolteachers, attend the Islamic schools. The majority of Thrace Muslim students, approximately 3,650, attend public secondary schools which are deemed better preparation for Greek-language universities.

Special consideration is given to Thrace Muslims for admission to technical institutes and universities that set aside 0.5 percent of the total number of places for them annually. Approximately 900 Thrace Muslim students take advantage of this affirmative action program; a small number choose to attend university in Turkey. In April 2005, the Minister of Education announced that ten full scholarships for the academic year 2005-2006 would be offered for Muslim students who will enter universities.

The Government maintains that Muslims outside Thrace are not covered by the Treaty of Lausanne and therefore do not enjoy those rights provided by the Treaty. Muslim parents complain that hundreds of Turcophone children in the Athens area do not receive remedial Greek instruction, other than in one multicultural elementary education "pilot school."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2000, the Ministry of Education and Religion rejected the application of the Scientologists for recognition and a house of prayer permit on the grounds that Scientology "is not a religion." The Church of Scientology is registered as a non-profit organization because the group's legal counsel advised that the Government would not recognize Scientology as a religion.

Minority religious groups have requested that the Government abolish laws regulating house of prayer permits, which are required to open houses of worship. Local police have the authority to bring to court minority churches that operate or build places of worship without a permit.

In May 2004, Nikodim Tsarnias, a former Greek Orthodox priest who is now a priest of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, was sentenced to three months in prison by the Aridea Criminal Court of First Instance on charges of establishing and operating a church without authorization after he held Macedonian Orthodox religious services without a house of prayer permit. The jail sentence was under appeal at the end of the period covered by this report.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties in dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Greek Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. Non-Orthodox religious organizations must provide separate and lengthy applications to government authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move places of worship to larger facilities. In contrast, Greek Orthodox officials have an institutionalized link between the church hierarchy and the Ministry of Education and Religion to handle administrative matters.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses are recognized as a "known" religion, members continued to face some harassment during the period covered by this report in the form of arbitrary identity checks, (although this problem has abated) and local officials' resistance to construction of places of worship. A decision on an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses regarding a property dispute over taxation rates involving their officially recognized headquarters remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In the past, several religious denominations, including Mormons and Jews, reported difficulty in renewing the visas of some non-EU citizen ministers and rabbis because the Government does not have a distinct religious workers' visa category. As part of obligations under the Schengen arrangement, all non-EU citizens face a more restrictive visa and residence regime than they did in the past.

Non-Orthodox citizens have claimed that they face career limits within the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and the civil service because of their religions. In the military, generally only members of the Orthodox faith become officers, leading some members of other faiths to declare themselves Orthodox. Few Muslim military personnel have advanced to the rank of reserve officer, and there were reports of pressure exerted on Greek Orthodox military personnel not to marry in the religious ceremony of non-Orthodox partners, which might cause them to be passed over for promotion.

Muslim citizens are underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations. While partly due to the education level of the available applicant pool, activists blame lack of transparency in the civil service hiring process and endemic discrimination. Muslims claim they are generally hired for lower level positions. One Turcophone Muslim currently holds a seat in Parliament. In Xanthi and Komotini, Muslims hold seats on the prefectural and town councils and serve as local mayors. Thrace municipalities hire Muslims as public liaisons in citizen service centers and provide Turkish lessons for other civil servants.

Unlike in Thrace, the growing Muslim community in Athens (composed primarily of economic migrants from South Asia, the Middle East and a small portion of Thrace Muslims and estimated by local press and experts to be between 200,000 and 300,000) still does not have an official mosque or any official cleric to officiate at religious functions, including funerals. Press reports in 2004 claimed that the number of unofficial prayer rooms in Athens ranged from 25 to 70. Members of the Muslim community must use the official Muslim clerics in Thrace for official religious rites. Some Muslims in Athens and other cities

travel to Thrace for wedding ceremonies and some transport their deceased there for religious burials; some who cannot afford to travel to Thrace must have unrecognized religious rites performed.

Although the Parliament approved a bill in 2000 allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in the Athens suburb of Peania, construction had not started by the end of the period covered by this report. The Archbishop of Greece and members of the Orthodox Church have made public their opposition to the cultural center, claiming it may "spread the ideology of Islam and the Arab world" and "serve as a breeding ground for terrorism" rather than as a simple cultural center. On a more practical level, local authorities in Peania have opposed the mosque and cultural center's location because there are less than a dozen Muslims in their community. Representatives of Muslim communities have complained that the proposed mosque and cultural center location is too far --at least 40 minutes' drive--from central Athens neighborhoods where many Muslim migrants live to be practical.

In May 2005, approximately 500 Old Calendarists staged a demonstration in Athens to protest a meeting of the World Council of Churches, the proposed Islamic cultural center, the use of credit cards and bar codes, and the influence of the EU.

Differences remain within the Turcophone Muslim community and between segments of the community and the Government regarding the means of selecting muftis. Under existing law, the Government appoints two muftis and one assistant mufti, all resident in Thrace. The Government argued that it must appoint the muftis, as is the practice in Muslim countries, because in addition to religious duties, they perform judicial functions under Muslim religious law, for which the State pays them. Hence the Government selects a committee of Turcophone Muslim notables, which recommends candidates for the 10-year terms of office. Some Muslims accept the authority of the two government-appointed muftis; other Muslims have "elected" two muftis to serve their communities since they maintain that the government of a non-Muslim country cannot appoint muftis. There is no established procedure or practice for these non-governmental elections, and the Government does not recognize the "elected" muftis.

The Government recognizes Shari'a (the Muslim religious law) as the law regulating family and civic issues of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The First Instance Courts in Thrace routinely ratify decisions of the Muftis who have judicial powers on civic and domestic matters. The National Human Rights Committee, an autonomous human rights body that is the Government's advisory organ on protection of human rights, has stated that the Government should limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties, and should stop recognizing sharia law, because it restricts civic rights of Muslim Greek citizens. There are underage marriages among Muslims, and some may be arranged. There is no evidence that there are forced marriages.

Controversy between the Muslim community and the Government also continues over the management and self-government of the wakfs, particularly regarding the Government's appointment of officials to serve on administrative boards that govern the wakfs and the degree and type of administrative control, which prior to the 1960s was exercised by the Muslim community. In response to objections from some Muslims that the appointment of officials weakened the financial autonomy of the wakfs and violated the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne, a 1996 presidential decree placed the wakfs under the administration of a committee for three years as an interim measure pending resolution of outstanding problems. The interim period has been extended every two years by presidential decree.

While members of missionary faiths report having difficulties with harassment and police detention due to anti-proselytizing laws, they note a marked improvement during the reporting period because of increased training and instruction given to police officers. Church officials express concern that anti-proselytizing laws remain on the books, although such laws no longer seriously hinder their activities.

A law on alternative forms of mandatory national service for religious and ideological conscientious objectors was enacted in 1998 and amended in 2004, and in 2001 the Government added a conscientious objector provision in the Constitution. The law provides that conscientious objectors may, in lieu of mandatory military service, work in state hospitals, or municipal and public services for two times the length of military service minus one month, typically 23 months. Conscientious objector groups generally characterized the legislation as a positive step, but criticized the longer service term as punitive. They also reported that uneven administration of the civilian service in some cases led to poor working conditions, and noted that it would be preferable for the civilian service to be under a civilian administration, rather than under the Ministry of Defense. Parents of three or more children are exempt from military service.

In May 2005, courts in Ioannina and Larissa sentenced two conscientious objectors who refused military service on religious grounds each to suspended sentences of six months imprisonment. Also in May, an Athens court sentenced a conscientious objector to a suspended 24-month sentence for insubordination stemming from a 1979 insubordination charge for refusing military service when there was no alternative civilian service in the country, after which he fled to and was granted political asylum in Germany. Amnesty International condemned the convictions of the three conscientious objectors, who are Jehovah's Witnesses.

Mandatory military service is three months for repatriated Greeks, and five months for repatriated conscientious objectors. Repatriated conscientious objectors who have in the past completed military service in their country of origin and became conscientious objectors later in their life are ineligible for alternative service and have taken their cases to the courts. One such case of a repatriated Greek who previously served in the Russian military and later became a Jehovah's Witness was heard in April 2005. The conscientious objector was arrested for insubordination for failing to report for military service and was held in pre-trial detention. In a landmark decision, the Military Court of Athens allowed him to apply for alternative civilian service.

Problems also exist with those who become conscientious objectors after they have performed their military service and are placed on reservist lists. These conscientious objectors are not recognized, as there is no legal provision covering those who change their status after having completed military service. Two cases involving such conscientious objectors are pending before the Council of State.

The law prohibits the functioning of private schools in buildings owned by non-Orthodox religious foundations; however, this law is not enforced in practice.

Orthodox religious instruction in public, primary, and secondary schools is mandatory for all Orthodox students. Non-Orthodox students are exempt from this requirement, however schools offer no alternative supervision for the children during the period of religious instruction; hence these children sometimes attend Orthodox religious instruction by default. Members of the Muslim community in Athens are lobbying for Islamic religious instruction for their children.

In the past, Muslim activists have complained that the Government regularly lodges tax liens against the wakfs, although they are tax-free foundations in theory. Under a national land and property registry law that entered into full effect in 1999, the wakfs, along with all property holders, must register all of their property with the Government. The law permits the Government to seize any property that the owners are not able to document; there are built-in reporting and appeals procedures. The wakfs were established in 1560; however, because of the destruction of files during the two world wars, the wakfs are unable to document ownership of much of their property. Because they have not registered the property, they cannot pay assessed taxes. The Government had not sought to enforce either the assessments or the registration requirement by the end of the period covered by this report.

Because the Greek Orthodox Church does not allow cremation, it remains unavailable in the country. Buddhist citizens have claimed that the lack of cremation as an available means of burial infringes on their religious rights. Citizens who wish to be cremated must be shipped at significant cost to Bulgaria or other countries.

The dispute over religious autonomy between Esphigmenou monastery on Mt. Athos and the Ecumenical Patriarchate that administers the region, continued. Esphigmenou is an Old Calendarist monastery that does not recognize the authority of the Patriarchate. In March 2005, the Council of State upheld a 2002 eviction request by the Ecumenical Patriarchate against the abbot of Esphigmenou on the grounds that it was not competent to judge the administrative jurisdiction of the Patriarchate over Mt. Athos. Approximately ninety similar appeals by other Esphigmenou monks are still pending. Religious authorities continue to claim that they would prefer to settle this dispute out of court.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Some non-Orthodox religious leaders report that their permanent members (non-missionaries) do not encounter discriminatory treatment. However, police regularly detain Mormons (primarily from outside the EU who are undergoing the protracted residence permit process), on average once every three months, usually after receiving complaints that the individuals engage in proselytizing. In most cases, these individuals are held for several hours at a police station and then released with no charges filed. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses report that their interaction with the police has improved during the reporting period due to increased training and instruction given to police officers. Two Jehovah's Witnesses were tried and acquitted in 2004 on proselytism charges. There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees apart from the problems of temporary police detention experienced by Mormons.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Religious affiliation is very closely linked to ethnicity. Many attribute the preservation of national identity to the actions of the Greek Orthodox Church during approximately 400 years of Ottoman rule and the subsequent nation-building period. The Church exercises significant social, political, and economic influence and it owns a considerable, although undetermined, amount of property.

Many Greeks assume any ethnic Greek is also an Orthodox Christian. Some non-Orthodox citizens have complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

Members of minority faiths have reported incidents of societal discrimination, such as local Orthodox bishops warning parishioners not to visit clergy or members of minority faiths, and requesting that the police arrest missionaries for proselytizing.

However, with the exception of the burgeoning Muslim population, most members of minority faiths consider themselves satisfactorily integrated into society. Organized official interaction between religious communities is infrequent.

Some non-Orthodox religious communities encountered difficulty in communicating with officials of the Orthodox Church and claimed that the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward their faiths has increased social intolerance toward their religions. The Orthodox Church has issued a list of practices and religious groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Protestants, Scientologists, Mormons, Baha'is, and others, which it believes to be sacrilegious. Officials of the Orthodox Church have acknowledged that they refuse to enter into dialogue with religious groups considered harmful to Orthodox worshippers; church leaders instruct Orthodox Greeks to shun members of these faiths.

While the Orthodox Church of Greece (unlike the Ecumenical Patriarchate) has little interfaith dialogue on local and national levels, it did invite the World Council of Churches to hold an international conference on "World Mission and Evangelism" in Athens in May 2005, that had worldwide representation from all major churches and denominations. The main aim of the conference was "to provide a space for Christians and churches to exchange their experience and think together about priorities in mission and the future of Christian witness."

There were a number of Holocaust commemorative events throughout the country during the period covered by this report. Two new Holocaust monuments were inaugurated, in Arta in July 2004, and in Komotini in May 2005. The Government passed legislation in 2003 establishing January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day, and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer was the keynote speaker at a national commemorative event in Thessaloniki in 2005. The Ministry of Education distributed materials to schools on the history of the Holocaust to be read in all schools on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

In October 2004, the Government participated in the organization of a seminar on "Teaching the Holocaust." Held under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education, it addressed 150 educators and Athens University education majors. This teacher-training seminar aimed to introduce Holocaust education in Greek primary and secondary schools. The seminar was organized by and held at the Jewish Museum of Greece in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Taskforce for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education (of which the country is an adjunct but not yet a full member), and the U.S. Embassy.

For the first time, the Jewish Communities of Greece celebrated Chanukah at a public square in Athens in December 2004.

Anti-Semitism continues to exist, particularly in the extremist press. The mainstream press and public often do not clearly distinguish between criticism of Israel and comments about Jews. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Wiesenthal Center, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Greek Helsinki Monitor denounced the Greek press for anti-Semitic articles and cartoons on several occasions in 2004. The Greek Jewish Community has asserted that the line between opposition to Israeli policies and attitudes toward Jews in general is often blurred, giving rise to anti-Semitic sentiment in the media and among the public.

Vandalism of Jewish monuments continued to be a problem during the period covered by this report, although the Government condemned the acts. In Thrace, where the Jewish population was decimated by the Holocaust, a memorial in Drama and a commemorative plaque on the Drama tobacco warehouse where Jews were detained before deportation in 1943 were desecrated in April and May 2004. Swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti were written on the Holocaust Memorial of Komotini in August 2004. Police have been unable to find perpetrators. Anti-Semitic graffiti were spray-painted at several spots along the busy Athens-Corinth highway. Anti-Semitic slogans also reportedly appeared in the Athens suburb of Kifissia and on the island of Tinos. In 2004, the Wiesenthal Center protested anti-Semitic graffiti on the country's highways and on other public buildings. The extreme right-wing group "Golden Dawn" regularly spray-paints anti-Semitic graffiti on bridges and other structures.

Some schoolbooks still carry negative references to Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition. Some bookstores sold and displayed anti-Semitic literature including the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

The Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee criticized statements of renowned Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis in 2003 and 2004. In 2003, Theodorakis called Jewish persons "the root of evil" but later qualified his statement by saying he had meant to criticize the Government of Israel. Government officials stated that Theodorakis's statements were directed against Israel and not against the Jewish people.

The Anti-Defamation League expressed "shock, anger and disbelief" over the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) awarding of the Olympiart Prize to Theodorakis, who, it said, "did not deserve the Olympic honor" because of his "unrepentant anti-Semitism." The Greek Helsinki Monitor also condemned the IOC's award to Theodorakis because of his anti-Semitic statements.

The June 2004 ECRI report recommended that the Greek authorities closely monitor the situation regarding anti-Semitic acts and statements, and take all necessary awareness-raising and punitive measures to put a stop to these acts. The report points out that Greek public opinion sometimes reflects the prejudices and stereotypes expressed against the Jewish Communities of Greece by the media or public figures. The report continues that while in some cases judicial authorities have taken measures to counter expressions of anti-Semitism, in other cases the criminal law provisions against hate speech have not been applied.

The Popular Orthodox Herald Party (LAOS), a minority party, promotes radical nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. LAOS leader George Karatzaferis won a seat in the European Parliament in June 2004 elections. Karatzaferis regularly attributes negative events involving the country to international Jewish plots. He used the party-owned television station to denounce Greek politicians with Jewish origins and to claim that Jews were behind the 9/11 attacks.

In November 2004, on one of the last days of Ramadan, as many as 2000 people gathered in protest in a Muslim Pomak village outside the northern city of Xanthi after two inappropriately-clad actresses working on a soap opera sought refuge from the rain in the village mosque. Representatives from the Government and the Greek Orthodox Church noted that the crew did not show adequate respect to a place of worship. Police detained the crew and actors, who were charged with disturbing the peace. Their cases were transferred to Athens, where they are pending. Five residents of the village were also charged with causing damage to the crew's property and the local police station.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers meet regularly with working-level officials responsible for religious affairs in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education and Religion. The Ambassador and other Mission representatives discussed religious freedom with senior government officials and religious leaders. The U.S. Embassy also regularly discusses religious freedom issues in contacts with other government officials, including mayors, regional leaders, and Members of Parliament. Officers from the Embassy and the Consulate General in Thessaloniki meet regularly with representatives of various religious and minority groups, including the Greek Orthodox Church and the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Scientology, Baha'i, and ancient polytheistic Hellenic religion communities and solicit their participation in Embassy social events. The Ambassador hosted an Iftar for celebrating Ramadan that was attended by local Muslim leaders and Ambassadors from countries with large Muslim populations. The U.S. Embassy and Consulate General investigate every complaint of religious discrimination brought to their attention.

The Ambassador attended Holocaust commemorations in Thessaloniki and Athens and he and other Embassy officers participated along with the Ministry of Education and the Jewish Museum of Greece in a teacher-training conference on the Holocaust in elementary and secondary schools. The Consulate General continues to monitor the issue of restitution of Jewish properties in Thessaloniki.

The consular section actively follows issues relating to religious workers' visas and property taxes.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulate General promote and support initiatives related to religious freedom. The Embassy and Consulate General uses the International Visitor program to introduce Muslim community leaders to the United States and American counterparts.

The Ambassador and Embassy officials regularly visit religious sites and conduct outreach throughout the country.

Released on November 8, 2005

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51555.htm)